

Spring Fever

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The days are getting longer and warmer, the geese are heading north and the urge to throw your leg over the saddle and fire up your motorcycle is almost too much to bear. As Steppenwolf said, all you want to do is "Get your motor runnin', head out on the highway!" Before you bring that bike back to life, however, there are a few things you must do to get it and yourself ready for the riding season.

First, listen to your MOM. We're not talking about that sweet lady that cooks Sunday dinner and tells you to pack a sweater in 90-degree weather. Instead, we're referring to your motorcycle owner's manual. If you put your bike in hibernation the way your MOM told you to, just follow its instructions to get your scooter back on the road. You'll have your work cut out for you, though, if you just parked that baby in the corner of your garage or shed.

For those of you that followed the MOM, your prep time will be relatively short. Pull the cover off, fill the gas tank, change the oil and check the tires for correct pressures and signs of dry rot. Remove any plugs you installed to keep the critters out of your exhaust, carburetor and air filter intake, and then connect the battery following your MOM's procedures. If you didn't put your battery on a trickle charger, you might have problems getting your bike fired up. But between your MOM and T-CLOCS (see poster inside this issue), your pre-ride inspection should cover everything.

Although your bike might be road ready now, you have to check your personal protective equipment to make sure it still fits and is in serviceable condition. Those extra pounds you put on over the holidays might mean a trip to the bike shop to buy a new jacket or leather chaps. This is also the time to make sure your bike is properly licensed and insured. Some of you might have de-registered your motorcycle during the winter to place it on your homeowners' insurance. If so, you'll have to go through the registration and insurance processes again. Do it early so you can get on the road as soon as the weather breaks.

Now you need to get yourself ready for the road. Your first trip shouldn't be from Fort Riley to Daytona for bike week. Ease back into shape and knock the rust off your riding skills by practicing the drills outlined in the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's "Riding Tips" handbook. You can get a free copy of the handbook online at http://www.msf-usa.org/downloads/Riding_Tips.pdf. You might need a refresher course if it's been longer than a few months since your last ride, so contact your local safety office to schedule an experienced rider's course. Lane position is important when you're on the road. Always position yourself in the lane of travel so you can be seen at the greatest distance possible. You'll also need to be more diligent with your scanning technique and pay particular attention to the road surface so you can spot any cracks or potholes that developed over the winter. Those of you stationed in colder climates know what I'm talking about: the pothole that bottoms out your suspension, rattles your eyeteeth and leaves you wondering if you bent your rims.



Every May is designated Motorcycle Awareness Month, but there's no reason why we should limit our commitment to safety to just one month a year. The greatest rise in motorcycle purchases and use occurs between March and April. According to the Insurance Information Institute, more than a million two-wheeled vehicles were purchased in 2005. More than 9 million motorcycles are registered in the United States, and about 33,000 of those are owned by Soldiers. Today's riders are your fellow Soldiers of all ranks and gender and your friends, relatives and neighbors. As the saying goes, it takes two to tango; motorcyclists and motorists share the responsibility of watching for and giving each other room to maneuver.

If your installation has a Motorcycle Mentorship Program, call them up and join the group. The MMP is a great way to meet people that share the same passion for riding, and you also can enjoy group rides and activities. If your installation doesn't have an MMP, contact your safety office to check on starting one.

Local MMPs increase the general public's awareness of motorcyclists by putting groups of Army riders, whether they're active duty, retired or DOD civilians, together on the road. Therefore, it's important to remember some folks still think motorcyclists are "over the edge" people that don't abide by the norms of society. We all know this isn't true and applies to only a very small percentage of the riding population, but be aware that someone is always watching. Your conduct can help elevate riding to a respectable and acceptable form of recreation, so save the wheelies for a sanctioned event.

Whether you're a hard-core or fair-weather rider, machine, mind and body have to be firing on all cylinders to ensure a safe and enjoyable riding season. Warm weather will come and go, so enjoy it while it's here. Live to ride, and ride safe!

---FYI

Before hitting the road, check out the Army Motorcycle Mentorship Program Web site at <https://crc.army.mil/mmp/index.asp>. Use the site as a resource for finding local riding associations and information on how to be a safer rider.